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DISCUSSIONS.

THE NATURE OF TRUTH: A REPLY.

It is a pleasure to discuss a problem with a colleague so fair-minded and so lucid as Dr. Tsanoff.¹ Perhaps the most fruitful thing I can do is to restate first of all the fundamental presuppositions of thought as I understand them. By the law of consistency, I understand that our experience of reality, whether we regard it from the point of view of meanings or of the objects intended, must possess such identities that we can take contents over again and so conceptualize our world, whether taken as individuals or as groups of individuals. Thus we can prepare for the future. It follows, of course, that if we must thus take experience, we cannot take it otherwise in the same respect and also that we must be thorough in our sorting, if we would have accurate prediction, *i. e.*, our contents must be disjunctively arranged. By the law of totality, I mean that these concepts or attributes, these part definitions of our world, must be seen to hang together. The parts of reality must make such differences to each other, directly or indirectly, as to constitute a dynamic whole. Atomism and parallelism, with their hydra-headed forms, make the ideal of knowledge impossible at the very outset. Our thoughts must belong with things and things with each other in a dynamic context in order for science to be worth while.

By the subject-object law, or the law of reference, I mean that thought presupposes the unique relation of an active or volitional referent, a prospective system of meanings, on the one hand, and a specific object, the referatum, which is selected by this cognitive purpose, on the other. The subject-object relation is distinct from other functional relations of referent and referatum through the volitional character of the referent. It is alive, it glows with interest. All other systems of relations, whatever their specific meaning may be, must be referred to this living subject in order to have systematic value. By thought being 'representative,' I mean only that the object, for purposes of truth, must be taken over into this systematic context of active experience. This is what happens in the process of judgment, the simplest form of which is symbolized in the proposition. The complete truth would be a systematic, personal expe-

¹ "Professor Boodin on the Nature of Truth," *PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW*, Vol. XIX, No. 6 (November, 1910), pp. 632 ff.

rience—the fulfilment of our living formal demands. Such an ideal is Hegel's absolute, which must be held valid as an epistemological ideal, whatever may be its claim to ontological existence. These claims I do not think it is the province of epistemology to settle.

By the law of finitude, I understand that an object, in order to be known, must be capable of being described or identified by a finite number of marks or rules. This is true even of the concept of the infinite, which I agree is hypothetically possible. The infinite series is defined, however, not by an enumeration of its instances, which is impossible, but by a finite rule or law. In truth, as in our other ideals, we demand realization or completeness; and this is possible only if the object, however infinite in its instances, submits to a finite law. If the universe itself is an infinite process with creative novelty, then truth is only in part realizable. That the universe is such is not a case for dogmatic assumption, but to be proven as other hypotheses are proven. As a universe of absolute chance would make truth impossible, the attempt to *prove* the existence of such a universe would be contradictory.

The law of finitude does not contradict the ideal of the completeness of truth. If the absolute should prove to be a valid metaphysical hypothesis, we must suppose that the canons which hold of our search for truth hold likewise for the absolute experience, including the law of finitude. For suppose that the absolute, instead of generalizing from finite relations, sees truth in terms of infinite relations, then our truth would bear no ratio to the absolute. With all our efforts at generalization, we should never approximate any nearer. Our research would be futile and irrelevant, and we should land in the dismal abyss of agnosticism as to even the problematic nature of truth, which of course must involve the existence and character of the absolute itself. In other words, truth would have entered upon the self-contradictory task of attempting to define the (by hypothesis) undefinable. In so far as we think of an absolute truth, we must think it as the completion of our demands, not as a violation of them.

I suppose the main difficulty as between my idealistic colleague and myself is that I cannot accept the ontological absolute as a postulate, but insist on proof. I admit that my incredulity here is due to my metaphysical leanings; but I do not see any good reason, in any case, why we should assume a metaphysical theory as a condition of our search for truth. Ought not our method to be neutral enough so as not to prejudice the results of the search? Is it not better to start with the common consciousness, with its dualism of thought and things, and to follow the dialectic of the thought process, as it attempts to master its more or less stubborn

world? This would seem to be Hegel's own procedure. If the necessities of the truth process should lead in the direction of an idealistic absolute, I hope I shall be honest enough to accept the implications without abandoning the truth. That I cannot do so now is due to no lack of respect for my idealistic colleagues, among whom I number my friend and teacher, Josiah Royce. Idealism certainly has made the only thorough-going attempt up to date to give a systematic account of experience. Its critics seem to have lived mostly on the weaknesses of idealism.

I insist, however, that the hypothesis of the universe as an absolute experience cannot be settled *a priori*. It must come as a result of our success in applying our logical ideals. Certainly the universe is in part a rational experience, for human thinking is an intrinsic part of the universe. In part, too, we have been successful in applying logical categories to the infra-human world. And in so far it cannot be regarded as irrational, whether it is non-rational or not. We find it convenient in any case to distinguish, for purposes of conduct, between the thinking and the non-thinking world and to treat the latter as means to the former as end. I have faith in a higher consciousness than the human as the fulfilment of our fragmentary insight and "the final cause" of the evolutionary process. But I do not see any leading toward this mind in the infra-human world—the world of the stone and the amoeba. I must rather seek it in the supra-human reaches as the goal of our ideal striving. While mystical and æsthetic intuition may seem to furnish some of us a very intimate acquaintance with such a world, I cannot see that such a faith exempts reason from dealing with it as an hypothesis and from testing it as any hypothesis is tested, through its success in simplifying and guiding experience. I do not deny the possibility of the idealistic absolute. There is certainly nothing contradictory in the conception of such a complete, systematic experience. On the contrary, it must always figure as an epistemological ideal, even if not an ontological assumption.

And now a word as regards the relation of the will to thought. For finite purposes it is convenient to regard the will as a larger genus than thought. While thought is the systematic activity of the will in its higher development, not all will is systematic and in this sense is non-rational. Its rationality at any rate is prospective, not actual. In our finite sphere there seems to be error, due to false assent or failure to assent to a supposed truth. Such must seem to the absolute idealist my failure to subscribe to his assumption that reality is an organic experience. If the logic is truly coercive, my failure to assent must be a certain blindness on the part of the will. It is the old question whether virtue can be reduced to mere knowledge, or whether we must not also assume a certain willingness

to accept the ideal, whether theoretical or practical. With Fichte I would agree that the will must furnish the goal and motive of thought. Else thought would move in a vacuum. If the will, however, chooses to think, it must do so in accordance with certain rules. It is this deliberation according to certain rules, whether the aim be merely formal agreement or also perceptual termination, which constitutes the difference between thinking and volition in general. To the fully organized will, such thinking has become the normal activity. The will, too, may divest itself of its practical, biological interest and pursue science as a sport—a game furnishing its own logical and æsthetic satisfaction apart from its survival value.

I do not assume, as my colleague seems to think, that the universe is irrational. Thought is as normal an expression of the universe at a certain stage of its development as the sex instinct. The very existence of the postulates of thought and the success thought has had in their application shows that the universe in part lends itself to thought's formulation. That it does so altogether is obviously a faith. Whether such a faith turns out to be absolutely true or not, we shall still hold to thought for its convenience in dealing with our world, for its part-truth, its prospective value. There are constancies which we can seize upon in the stream of experience and thus regulate our conduct. Nature not only favors thought as regards capacity and demand, but it puts a premium upon thought as regards survival. What reality must be taken as in the last analysis, must be the outcome of the truth experiment.

I cannot agree with my colleague that thought is the only final way of evaluating life. It is the only way we can attain the truth of life. But, "there is not only one way to the realm of the Gods," to quote an old Viking poem. Æsthetic appreciation furnishes another evaluation of life which cannot be reduced to terms of thought, and some who have grown weary of the arduous path of truth have decided to pitch their tents in the restful oasis of beauty. Others again have found in our sense of duty, in the urging of conscience, the key which unlocks reality. Temperament no doubt has a great deal to do with our preference here. But what must not be lost sight of is that there are different ways of reaching the final significance of life and if we are not able to drive the triple team of values abreast, we must at least appreciate that our preference does not annul distinctions—does not make æsthetic appreciation truth. The failure to distinguish these types of evaluation, or using thought loosely to stand for each and all indifferently, has been a serious weakness of Hegelianism. They may all be harmonious and complementary in human nature as realized. Identical they cannot be.

If this discussion makes the problem any clearer, the reader owes it to my colleague, Dr. Tsanoff, for his lucid and gracious criticism.

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REJOINDER.

PROFESSOR BOODIN's restatement of the laws of consistency and of totality leads me only to repeat my appreciation of his plea for epistemological unity and coherence. His present formulation of the 'subject-object law' and of the law of finitude makes his position somewhat clearer. Professor Boodin correctly points out the necessity of recognizing what he calls the volitional character of the thought-referent,—that is, I take it, the dynamic solidarity of thought and will in concrete experience. He explicitly declares that such a "systematic, personal experience" must be held valid as an epistemological ideal. In his restatement, again, of the law of finitude, Professor Boodin plainly admits that the attempt to prove the existence of a universe of absolute chance would be self-contradictory; that is, that, if our study of the philosophical universe is to be fruitful epistemologically, we must proceed throughout upon the basis that experience is an immanently coherent system. The higher truth must be the completion, not the denial and violation of the lower truth.

The 'universe' for the epistemologist is the systematic, organic, dynamic experience, which we can profitably study from the point of view of the mutually implicative relations which obtain in it. In so far, then, Professor Boodin and myself seem to be in substantial agreement. Indeed, so long as problems frankly epistemological are under consideration, I can follow him quite closely. But, if one reads again his exposition of the four epistemological laws, one finds everywhere a string attached. Professor Boodin is always careful to add that, while this law and that are valid for epistemology, they need not necessarily hold for metaphysics. There is no need of quoting any passages here: Professor Boodin's Reply is before the reader's eyes. My main criticism of his position was and is precisely concerning this very point. What Professor Boodin calls "absolute truth" is, by his own statement, 'to be regarded "as the completion of our [epistemological] demands, not as a violation of them."' Nevertheless, because I maintain the position implied in this and similar statements of his own epistemological principles; that is, because I insist that philosophy must be of one piece, that epistemology cannot be one thing, and metaphysics another; because I insist that the 'laws of metaphysics' must be the completion, not the violation, of the laws of episte-